Acquisition group explores use of targeting pod on B-1

by 1st Lt. David Cromwell ASC Public Affairs
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Air Force photo

EDWARDS AFB, Calif. — A fit check was performed on the B-1B Lancer in May to ensure the Sniper XR targeting pod would mate correctly with the contractor-made pylon. A contract was awarded earlier this month by the B-1 Systems Group for a demonstration of the pod and pylon. The Sniper XR targeting pod will provide the bomber with the positive identification capability that is becoming necessary for the missions it will be tasked to perform.

Work being done here today is ensuring that the B-1 fleet is postured for missions it will be tasked to carry out.

The B-1 Systems Group is designing modifications for the multi-role bomber so it can use a Sniper XR targeting pod to provide the positive identification capability that is proving critical in today's evolving warfare.

"It really became apparent in Afghanistan and Iraq that we needed this capability," said Lt. Col. George Raihala, deputy chief of the projects division at the systems group. Col. Raihala is also a former weapon systems officer on the B-1.

"In Iraq we used the B-1's ground moving target indicator radars to look for Scuds out in the western desert," he said. "The problem is our radar resolution is insufficient to positively ID a target. I would have to call in a fighter with a pod to look at it and tell me what it was.

"There were times we'd find movers near potential hide sites, and no fighters were available so we'd lose a target."

"When you look at the B-1's tremendous capability to drop conventional weapons and you combine that with its speed and loitering ability, the addition of positive ID capability really becomes a critical factor in meeting the Chief of Staff's objectives of reducing the F2T2EA (find, fix, track, target, engage, assess) kill chain cycle," said Eric Branum, a program manager with the B-1 Systems Group.

To provide that identification capability, engineers and program managers here are planning to configure every B-1 in the inventory with the hardware and software necessary to integrate a Sniper XR Targeting Pod to the bomber.

The aircraft and the pod will be integrated so that the pod will be cued to the B-1 radar's line of sight. When something shows up on the radar, the aircrew can then feed the coordinates to the pod pulling up a clear visual image of the target.

The image that was indistinguishable on the radar will now let the crew know whether the target is really a tank or a truck, enabling positive combat identification.

“You take a capability like this and combine it with other works in progress, such as the GBU-38 (500-pound JDAM) integration, and you transform the B-1 into an incredible, high-precision bomber that reduces the risk of collateral damage while increasing its ability to hit time-sensitive targets,” said Mr. Branum.

Mr. Branum also said that an un-definitized contract was awarded earlier this month for a demonstration of the pod and pylon, and the contractor will be responsible for supporting the test flights scheduled for the summer of 2006.

The current program has three goals: develop the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty or START compliant modifications to the hard points necessary for attaching the pylon, modify and aerodynamically qualify the pod/pylon structure for installation on the bomber and demonstrate a limited positive identification capability.

The tests will be conducted at Edwards AFB, Calif. Full up integration of the pods on the bomber is scheduled to begin in fiscal year 2009.

“With the way warfare is currently moving, putting Sniper XR on the B-1 will reap huge benefits in the future,” said Col. Raihala.